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Fathers' Wit

Humorous Quotes by (and About) Him Indoors

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Extract

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Introduction

What has been proven to reduce crime, child poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy *and* requires no new taxes? The answer is Fatherhood. This being so, why is it that, with the exception of one-parent families and the elderly, there is no more beleaguered class in society today than fathers? Fathers are second-class citizens, sidelined, marginalized, ridiculed, castigated and undervalued. Listen to the news, pick up any newspaper, and you'd think there were only three kinds of dads: deadbeat, child abusers and deranged lunatics who dress up as superheroes and scale high buildings.

The Cult of Motherhood continues to flourish, but where are the worshippers at the Shrine of Fatherhood? Where is the biker with 'DAD' tattooed on his bicep? Where is the banner emblazoned with the slogan, 'Hello Dad'? When it comes to raising children, even the language is predicated against dads. 'Mothering' is defined as 'creating, nurturing and protecting'; 'Fathering' is defined as 'to procreate'. No emotional bond is implied. Fathers have the Mother of all Battles getting the recognition they deserve. The only time affection and gratitude are sanctioned is on Father's Day. Did you know that there are more reverse-charge calls on Father's Day than on any other day of the year? So, it has come to this: children are now charging their dad to tell him they love him.

No man can give birth to a child, but no woman can give a father's love. This treasury of fathers' wit is a Valentine to Dad, a celebration of the unique and vital role he plays in shaping our

lives. Papa is a man of many parts – protector, provider, playmate and, in the case of most daughters, pushover. Every stage of fatherhood is explored, from family planning to empty nest, tackling the issues that *really* preoccupy fathers – such as sex, nappy-changing, sex, the family car, sex, how to stop your teenage daughters having sex and sex. Daughters, sons, wives and other family members offer sharp observations but, quite properly, most of the voices belong to fathers themselves. Old or new, good or bad, present or absent, Dad is here in his infinite variety. The only criterion for inclusion is that he should have some gem of wit to impart.

Fatherhood is a heavy responsibility so it can use a little light relief. The birth of a baby may be the happiest day of a man's life but it can also be the most terrifying. In an instant, everything changes. As Spock said (Mr not Dr), 'It's life, Jim, but not as we know it.' Sharing the funny side of the paternal predicament with some of those who've been there, done that, got the sick-stained T-shirt, can help allay fears and make the challenge seem less daunting. As Spock said (Dr not Mr), 'Laughter is preferable to tears since there is less cleaning up to do afterwards.' (Or was that Mrs?)

Some of the best and funniest insights come from TV dads. Fathers have a long pedigree on the small screen. *The Flintstones* featured one of the first pregnancies on prime-time US television. A 2002 survey showed that in 87 per cent of US sitcoms a father is the central character. Some of the most memorable TV pops include: Ben Cartwright (*Bonanza*); Albert Steptoe (*Steptoe and Son*); Fred Flintstone (*The Flintstones*); Homer Simpson (*The Simpsons*); Jim Royle (*The Royle Family*); Dan Conner (*Roseanne*); Cliff Huxtable (*The Cosby Show*); Gomez Addams (*The Addams Family*); Ozzy Osbourne (*The Osbournes*); Herman Munster (*The Munsters*); Alf Garnett (*Till Death Us Do Part*); Frank Spencer (*Some*

Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em); Ray Barone (*Everybody Loves Raymond*) ... how long do you have?

Watching these TV dads as we're growing up, having them right there in our living rooms, can exert a powerful if not unsettling influence. 'One year, *Bewitched* changed Darrins just like that,' recalls Rosie O'Donnell. 'For months I kept going up to my father saying, *Daddy*? Just checking.' Some children spend so long in front of the telly, it's possible they see more of the TV dads than of their own fathers. No bad thing in some cases. Who better to act *in loco parentis* than the warm, witty and wise Bill Cosby (provided they don't also copy his dubious taste in jumpers). TV dads offer valuable parenting tips – even if it's how *not* to do it. Yet, however bumbling or incompetent, most have their heart in the right place: the hapless Frank Spencer dotes on Little Jessica; 'Prince of Darkness' Ozzy Osbourne is practically Mr Mom to Kelly and Jack; and for all his many flaws, Homer Simpson loves Bart, Lisa and Maggie as much as beer, donuts and TV. Almost.

President George Bush *Père* famously declared that families would do better to follow the example of the Waltons than the Simpsons. Which father would you prefer? John Walton is the perfect paterfamilias, promoting virtues of thrift and self-improvement, dispensing homespun wisdom and never failing to say goodnight to his children. Homer Simpson is an overweight, workshy slob who forgets to pick up his son, Bart, from soccer practice and gets mad when someone spanks him as his own preferred form of corporal punishment is strangulation; he refuses to take his daughter to a bookfair ('If it doesn't have Siamese twins in a jar, it's not a fair'), and when asked if he likes his kids, says, 'What do you mean, *all* the time? Even when they're *nuts*?'

The American public gave their answer by voting Homer Simpson 'Best TV Dad' in an online poll. John Walton could

only scrape ninth place. How could a jaundice-yellow cartoon character with no chin and a prominent overbite ever be considered a better father than Walton Mountain's paragon of paternity? Simple. Homer is more human. We can identify with him because he is *not* the perfect father, but he does try to do the best for his kids and they know that. Comedy plays a crucial part. Family life is particularly susceptible to sentimentalization. The humour of *The Simpsons* keeps it real and inoculates it against the schmaltz that infects *The Waltons*. *The Waltons* is 'feel-good' but vapid and hollow at heart. *The Simpsons* is genuinely heart-warming and uplifting. George Bush and his like may denounce it as subversive and setting a bad example, but there are few shows with a deeper moral core. The Simpsons family is neither rich nor perfect but they *are* happy. And that's what is *really* subversive, what really riles our betters – the idea that you don't have to be rich or perfect to be happy.

The Simpsons offers a rounded view of average family life, showing that, while it can be wonderful, caring and fun, it can also be horrible, selfish and cruel. What lies at its heart, though, is love. 'Love,' said Peter Ustinov, 'is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.' In families, forgiveness is in daily demand, and particularly so in father–son relationships. The parable of the Prodigal Son never goes out of fashion. Ernest Hemingway wrote a poignant short story called 'The Capital of the World' about a Spanish father who becomes estranged from his son. After an argument, the son leaves home and goes to Madrid. Years later, the father is desperate for a reconciliation and travels to Madrid. But he is unable to trace his son. More in hope than expectation, he places an ad in the local newspaper: 'Dear Paco. All is forgiven. Meet me Tuesday at noon in front of the Hotel Montana. Papa.' The father arrives in the square at the appointed time,

and finds 800 young men named Paco all hoping to be reunited with their fathers.

'Romance fails us and so do friendships, but the relationship of Father and Child, less noisy than all the others, remains indelible and indestructible, the strongest relationship on earth,' wrote Theodor Reik. The quotes in this collection bear witness to that unbreakable bond.

One thing to emerge in the course of compiling this collection is something that might be called Dad Humour. Common to all fathers, crossing centuries, continents and cultures, it's a curious blend of cynicism, silliness and more corn than Kansas in August. All kids start by thinking *their* dad is the funniest person on earth. Then they grow up and realize that Dad Humour, like Dad Dancing, is the most toe-curlingly embarrassing torture a father can ever inflict on his poor innocent offspring. The irony is that children who spend their teenage years turning beetroot-red at dad's lame gags later find themselves helplessly repeating the very same lame gags to their own children. *Plus ça change* ...

Unlike many books about fathers, this one doesn't set out to be instructive or prescriptive; just funny. But since humour is truth-telling, it ends up telling you a lot more than many of those bossy childcare manuals. A great deal of wisdom is wrapped up in these nuggets of fatherly wit.

So what's the secret of being a good dad – apart from the obvious but critical, 'Know when to stop tickling'? The simple answer seeps through these pages by osmosis ... Be There. To be in your child's memories tomorrow you have to be in their lives today. Not just for the so-called milestones like birthdays, concerts and graduations, but for those seemingly small everyday moments such as pushing a swing, sharing a pizza, reading a bedtime story. After all, you never know when you're making a memory. Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson,

would often refer to a day in his youth when his father took him fishing. He remembered the trip as a special time when his father taught him many lessons he carried with him through life. And how did Boswell's father remember the same excursion? The entry in his journal for that day records just a single sentence: 'Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted.'

What is a Father?

Directly after God in heaven comes Papa.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

A father is first a curiosity, then an amusement-park ride, then a referee, and finally, a bank.

Esquire *magazine*

A father is a cash-point machine in trousers.

Martin Hart

A father is a man who carries photographs where his money used to be.

Anon

A father is a banker provided by nature.

French proverb

A father is a giant shock absorber, there to protect the family from the ruts and bumps on the road of life.

W. Bruce Cameron

Daddies are for catching spiders.

Molly, aged 4

A dad is the one that gets your Maths homework wrong.

Jane, aged 8

Father is the guy who's quick to appear with the camera and just as quick to disappear when there's a diaper to be changed.

Joan Rivers

Fathers' Wit

A father is a man who prefers sleep over sex.

Ralph Anderson

A dad is someone you can find in the pub.

Louis, aged 7

Father is the thoughtful man who will suggest putting vodka in a baby's bottle when he's crying.

Joan Rivers

A dad is the one who, after a roast dinner on Sunday, falls asleep in his comfy armchair with the newspaper over his face, while mum does the washing up.

Jamie, aged 10

A father is something mythical and infinitely important: a protector, who keeps a lid on all the chaotic and catastrophic possibilities of life.

Tom Wolfe

When I was a little kid, a father was like the light in the refrigerator: every house had one, but no one really knew what either of them did once the door was shut.

Erma Bombeck

A father should be a man of many faces – an artist, a philosopher, a statesman and, above all, a prolific dispenser of good sense and justice.

Adlai Stevenson

A dad is a man who says, 'I'll put up a conservatory!', 'I'll decorate the box-room!' 'I'll mow the lawn!' but never gets round to it because he prefers playing golf and going down the pub.

Chris Miller

A father is a plaster that cures all the ills of his children.

Sean Cooper

A father is a giant from whose shoulders you can see for ever.

Perry Garfinkel

Any man can be a father. It takes someone special to be a dad.

Anon

A good father is a little bit of a mother.

Lee Salk

Having children makes you no more a father than having a violin makes you a violinist.

Anon

A dad is someone who helps you with your times tables and knows all the capitals of all the countries in the entire world.

Scott Willis

A dad is someone you can act daft with and practise your judo moves on.

Jordan, aged 8

The thing to remember about fathers is, they're men. A girl has to keep it in mind: they are dragon-seekers, bent on improbable rescues. Scratch any father, you find someone chock-full of qualms and romantic terrors, believing change is a threat – like your first shoes with heels on, like your first bicycle it took such months to get.

Phyllis McGinley

A dad is someone who loves you more than anyone else except your mum.

Melissa, aged 9

Fatherhood

What's it called when you're damned if you do, and damned if you don't? Oh, yes, fatherhood.

Paul Hennessy, 8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter

I won't lie. Fatherhood isn't easy like motherhood. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. Except for some mag wheels.

Homer Simpson, The Simpsons

Fatherhood is pretending the present you love most is soap-on-a-rope.

Bill Cosby

My idea of fatherhood is sending a telegram from Abyssinia saying, 'Have you had your child yet, and what have you called it?'

Evelyn Waugh

The great thing about being a guy is that bathroom lines are shorter. You can open your own jars. Your butt is not a fact in a job interview. All your orgasms are real. Foreplay is optional. You can sit with your knees apart no matter what you're wearing. Not liking a person does not preclude having great sex with them. There's always a game on somewhere. But most of all, being a father.

Anon

A father's job is not to get tired of what he has a right to get tired of: for example, small people who keep doing things that you tell them not to do, and when you ask them why they keep doing these things, they reply, 'I don't know.'

Bill Cosby

Being a father is like doing drugs – you smell bad, get no sleep and spend all your money on them.

Paul Bettany

Life doesn't come with an instruction book – that's why we have fathers.

H. Jackson Brown Sr

Men will now get up and walk with the baby in the middle of the night, change its diapers, and give it a bottle, but in their heart of hearts they still think they shouldn't have to.

Rita Rudner

I'm nostalgic for a time when dads never changed nappies, never read bedtime stories, couldn't speak to their children and were only expected to administer corporal punishment.

Ted Searle

There are to us no ties at all just in being a father. It's the practice of parenthood that makes you feel that, after all, there may be something in it.

Heywood Broun

After all, I'm your father. It's true if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else. But that's no excuse.

Samuel Beckett

I make it a rule to pat all children on the head as I pass by – in case it is one of mine.

Augustus John

I've got more paternity suits than leisure suits.

Engelbert Humperdinck

Yes, I did father a child with Wendy Craig. It all happened in the 1960s. We were very excitable then.

John Mortimer